



Nonprofit Human Services Cabinet

Testimony before the Human Services Committee

SB 251, An Act Concerning Programs Administered By The Department Of Social Services.

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March 4, 2014

Senator Slossberg, Representative Abercrombie, and distinguished members of the Human Services Committee, my name is Jeff Shaw, Project Director, for the Connecticut Nonprofit Human Services Cabinet), and I support the intent of S.B. 251, An Act Concerning Programs Administered By The Department Of Social Services. As part of the ConneCT modernization initiative, this bill requires the department to accept and time stamp client documentation in any, and every form (mail, email, fax, and in-person at regional offices) to decrease the likelihood of improper termination of benefits due to (DSS staff) application processing delays.

As you already know, the ConneCT modernization initiative is adding online and phone gateways to replace obsolete contact points that have been in use for decades (1980's) without major upgrades in technology. While the initiative will not be completed until December 2015, many clients, advocates, and other stakeholders have experienced tremendous frustration when contacting DSS offices beginning with unreasonably long phone wait times. Of particular concern, however, is the improper termination of benefits (Medicaid, food stamps, cash assistance) due to backlogs in both the document management scanning process and the eligibility management system, which automatically generates termination notices because it is separate from the computer system used to manage the documents (the scanning process). In other words, clients may get improper benefit termination notices through no fault of their own, since their re-determination information must be (separately) entered into the eligibility system after it is scanned-in during the document management scanning process.

While clients will receive benefits retroactively if they are inadvertently terminated from receiving benefits, a better solution to this compounding issue is extending benefits through "continuous eligibility" to ensure clients do not lose Medicaid, food stamps, or cash assistance while their forms are in the scanning or eligibility management processes. And precedent exists for this policy. As a precautionary measure last August, DSS extended benefits to nearly 16,000 households that were at risk of losing them the following month. Additionally, over a decade ago, Connecticut had continuous eligibility in place for children from 1999-2003, which improved the quality of their health care (timely care, filled prescriptions, etc.), but also reduced administrative burdens and costs (re-enrollment) for the state.

The provisions in this bill, both a time stamp once the document is received by the document management scanning process and a separate recording of the date received in the applicant's or recipient's online benefits account, would add additional visibility to eligibility and may decrease the likelihood of improper termination of benefits. However, I understand that staff capacity is limited, and

would not want these provisions to lead to unintended consequences of even longer delays in application processing. The intent of the legislation is to help ensure that documents received by applicants or recipients of benefits are processed in a timely, accurate manner and our member organizations are happy to collaborate with DSS staff to make that effort a reality.

Thank you for your time and consideration.